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III

DAILY LIFE

The Day's Work

THE villager wakes and rises with the sun. Being at liberty to take his repose at any time of the day, whenever indeed he feels a tiredness in his limbs, he is not likely to be a lie-abed in the morning. If the weather be hot he is early at work in the garden to have his day's task through before the sometimes grilling heat of noon; if the night has been a cold one (for many New Guinea nights are cold to those who live in New Guinea), he issues forth from his house bringing some of the night's fire with him, to meet the sun and to profit by the warmth of its first rays.

There is no bustle of preparation for breakfast. A lump or so of cold taro or a fragment of roast sago left overnight constitutes the morning meal, and often enough a man is content to go with none at all. If he have work before him in the garden he will soon set off accompanied by his wife and children, with his axe and knife in his hand and his rude digging-stick over his shoulder; usually, too, with a long spear against some chance of game. If there be no immediate call for his masculine strength in the garden he allows his wife and children to go to their work alone, to perform the drudgery of weeding and grubbing while he employs his mind and fingers upon some more interesting or creative task—such as the fashioning of a spear, the plaiting of a cane belt, or the chopping of a mess-bowl from a block of wood.

Such employments as these he follows with a deal of comfortable assiduity, for not only does he see the object take shape as he proceeds, but the nature of his work permits of a seat in the shade and, like knitting or hemstitching, does nothing to hinder conversation.

Some women will have remained at home to perform

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512 462 sedentary tasks of their own—different always, for none of the crafts are shared by the two sexes. So we may see the clay pot growing coil by coil in the hands of the housewife, the bark-cloth spreading out into a sheet under the blows of her mallet, or the furnace of green leaves, rolling out clouds of smoke, from which she will obtain a small residuum of salt. These and many other such tasks are woman's province, upon which there is no male encroachment.

512 Some work therefore will be going forward in the forenoon, but there is not unusually a quietness in the village during this part of the day. The children may have remained, but they are as likely to be down by the river-side or playing at work in the garden with their elders. Of those men and women who chance to be unoccupied none will think it shame to sleep, and there will be no loud life about the village, perhaps no sound but the ceaseless regular whacking of a bark-cloth maker's stone mallet upon the log.

512 462 241 Meanwhile the bulk of the village population is probably employed in the garden. If it be the mere routine of weeding and of gathering a bagful of taro for the pot, gardening is women's work; but whenever the business of clearing, planting, or fencing is afoot, then the whole family will be engaged, or sometimes all the families of a clan, in a somewhat unorganized and happy-go-lucky working bee.

The heat of the garden clearing, fenced in by a high wall of forest, may be almost insufferable to a European, but the native, hatless and streaming with sweat, bears it well enough. The party may be cutting into the bush to increase the area for fresh planting. The women and children clear the undergrowth and trailers and the men deal with the tree trunks. Amid the sound of axe-blows and those loud expulsions of breath—*'ugh, ugh!'*—which accompany them and with which the Orokaiva seems to convince himself he is working very hard, may be heard occasionally the clear yodel-like call, something between a shout and a song, which shows the workmen to be in his highest spirits. And when from time to time he brings down a tree, he accompanies the prodigious crash of its fall with a not less prodigious Orokaiva hoot, and turns to the next, or throws

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512 241 down his axe and turns to his string bag hanging on a stump for refreshment of betel-nut and a breather.

After the felling of timber there is the burning of it, which is hot work with a vengeance, for the hottest day is regarded as the best opportunity for making a clean sweep of the litter which clearing has left behind it. In none of his gardening operations, however, does the Orokaiva display unnecessary haste. He moves hither and thither, gathering armfuls for the blaze, and gives it a desultory poke or raking with his long stick. Meanwhile, the atmosphere is visibly dancing with the heat, and broad leaves are caught and floated upwards by the ascending currents of air.

512 417 Maybe the work on hand is that of fencing. One or two men are driving the stakes and laying the rails that constitute the primitive fence. Theirs is the skilled work—if so it may be called—while it is for the women folk to maintain the supply of materials. Among these unskilled labourers the unmarried daughters, strapping young women who have discarded their bark-cloth skirts for greater freedom, move through the garden as naked as Eve through Paradise, supposing the mother of mankind to have worn at least an armlet or two or a flower in her hair for ornament. The children—particularly the little girls, who show an earlier disposition for work than do their brothers—bear their small and irresponsible share. The baby, meanwhile, hanging in a knitted string bag from some convenient tree-[854] branch, sleeps undisturbed.

512 492 The housewife has probably pulled some taro and gathered some of the edible leaves with which it is to be seasoned; and now when the morning's work is over she will stow these into her string bag, which has incredible powers of distension, squat beside it to arrange upon the crown of her head the band which serves as handle, and so rise to her feet to plod contentedly homeward. The baby [854] hangs, still sound asleep, in a second bag upon the woman's stooping back, and her husband, shouldering his spear and digging stick again, leads the way.

So in their own time most of the families will have returned by noon to the village. There may be something to

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512 eat, made ready by some woman who has been at home during the forenoon, but, whether or no, the toilers will probably retire into their houses for the siesta.

512 513 If the day be warm there will be drowsiness in the village atmosphere and almost universal somnolence among its inhabitants for an hour or two after midday.

The Evening's Recreation

512 252 The real activity of the village commences at about three o'clock. The women will soon begin peeling the taro, each seated on the ground before her own house. The diurnal grand repast is in preparation, and what with the peeling of vegetables and the cooking of them a housewife has perhaps an hour and a half of final work to do. Not that this is hard or unpleasant, but rather of a sociable nature, for little groups gather round the pot in which the taro is slowly seething under a covering of leaves. The men have risen from their rest and may foregather to chew betel or will sit before their respective houses renewing some sedentary task of yesterday—for such tasks may drag on unconscionably. Often a man is content with the society of his immediate [854] family, playing fondly with his younger children and carrying an infant in his arms.

512 301 302 883 Women and girls will go for water, and youths perhaps for firewood. Young bloods may appear, with a dash of paint on their cheeks and an ornament of boar's tusk or shell on their breasts. Their hair is glossy and greasy and their fine young figures set off with a sheen of coco-nut oil. In the most indirect manner and with a somewhat studied nonchalance they are, if the truth be known, bent on courtship, desiring principally to show off their masculine charms in those quarters where it suits them.

512 526 As the cool of the evening approaches the village grows more animated. If one game or another happens to be in vogue, youths of all ages will be boisterously engaged in it. The favourite games of the Orokaiva have something of war or chase about them. A number of players, with darts poised for throwing, stand in a kind of extended order while one boy bowls a disk-shaped section of banana stem along

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the ground before them. Then the waiting spearmen discharge their darts at the flying disk, seeing in imagination the wild pig flying past the hunter. This, like most native games, has no finality and no winner. Whoever lodges his mock spear in the rolling disk utters his shout of triumph—maybe his own name or that of his clan—while all rush forward to recover their weapons and form into line again for the next attempt.

A more uproarious pastime is the sham fight between two contending parties, when mock spears are thrown with great violence and evaded with great address. The spear is usually the six-feet-long stalk of a large herb weighted with its rhizome, a very solid knob, which gives power and directness to the missile and makes it worth one's while to dodge. The shield is a miniature of light palm spathe. Armed with these weapons the parties attack one another, launching their spears or parrying or dodging those of the enemy with all the cries and actions of true warfare. When the game is played by small boys, the contending parties draw closer and closer, snatching up and returning the spent weapons of their adversaries with gradually mounting spirit, until the combat thickens and may become a hand-to-hand scuffle in which the spear is turned into a club. An unlucky hit may compel one of the combatants to withdraw weeping from the fray, but one never sees bad blood engendered in these village games, however warlike, and a stand-up fight must be a very rare occurrence.

With the approach of dusk the various families of the village will forsake amusement and employment, or the lack of either, for the business of eating their evening meal. About this there is little or no formality. The housewife is responsible for the due preparation of the repast, which is the only regular one of the day. If she be a dutiful spouse she seldom fails in punctuality, for the hungry Orokaiva husband is short-tempered and any break-down in the catering of his household will cause domestic disagreement. (Indeed, it would appear that neglect of household duties may be as just and potent a cause of divorce as actual infidelity.) There will be a few friendly gifts of food. If a man

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512 has made a catch of fish his wife, having cooked it in the
431 evening, will carry portions across to her neighbours; but for the most part the meal is prepared for the immediate family.

512 After dark there is conversation and the liveliness of the
521 village will continue. Any happening of the humdrum day
578 will have passed from ear to ear, and one may now hear occasional shouted comments, greeted with yells of laughter from a distant fireside. Some incident of slighted feelings during the day may lead to an angry outburst in the evening, when the victim pours forth his feelings in a molten stream of indignation, which may call forth fierce retorts, but is more likely to be heard in silence by the rest of the village. Sometimes an individual, either to air his own grievance or express his opinion in an inter-clan dispute, will parade back and forth among the houses, shaking his spear and denouncing his enemy. But happily, though swift to anger, the Orokaiva is content to allow it a verbal overflow, and very seldom comes to blows with his fellow villagers.

512 Often the menfolk of the village will be met in a cheerful
533 company to enliven—or some would say make hideous—the night with song. The singers assemble in the *oro* or men's house, drawn into a close circle about a fire or preferably a kerosene lamp. Three or four drums and a conch-
[534] shell are the instruments of music, the last in the hands of a smallish boy who, though thrust somewhat into the background, willingly supplies the wind for an instrument which is more exacting of endurance than of musical finesse. When everything is in readiness the drums begin to beat and some precentor strikes up on a high pitch, singing with spirit and not without a certain taste one or two bars of a melody to words that are for the most part meaningless. As he finishes, his song is caught up and repeated in a very full-throated manner by the chorus, accompanied by the drums and the well-timed but not always harmonious blasts of the shell trumpet. The leader sings again and the chorus follows, till, after many repetitions, they all pause from their exertions and refresh themselves with betel-nut. With frequent changes of tune and frequent pauses this singing may go one till late at night; indeed on occasions of festivity

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it is no uncommon thing to see the singers dispersing for their night's rest at break of day. But happily, when a European is in their village they have the politeness and the deference to the common European habit of sleeping by night, to discontinue their concert when he extinguishes his lamp. Then the older folk and the mere boys will retire to rest and the young men will follow their own devices, either turning in or going a courting. No one will see them creep into the houses of their sweethearts where by prearrangement they are assured of a welcome.

The village is now in complete silence. It may be warm and drizzling rain, or it may be clear and cold. In the latter case the fires will be burning underneath the pile-houses, and now and again one will hear the voice of the father gruffly rousing one of his children to go down and stir the embers or add fuel. Then follow the sounds of sleepy and complaining acquiescence, the fire flares and crackles, the youngster creeps back to his sleeping mat, and all is silence once more.

At times in the dead of night one may waken to hear a woman's voice raised in a solitary dirge for dead husband or child—long-sustained, clear notes whose effect is singularly sad. From the standpoint of music it must be confessed that such performances are variable, yet sometimes they are of the purest tone and uttered with an admirable restraint. Long-drawn, and with a suspicion of *tremolo*, the dirge ends characteristically with two or three high-pitched sobs or whimpers. There are now no sounds other than the tireless croaking of the frogs in the swamp, the hooting of owls, or the occasional flapping of a fruit-bat among the bananas, until the tailless rooster on the house-top thinks fit to salute the coming dawn.

Occasional Activities

Such is the uneventful routine of the Orokaiva day. Yet although there is undoubtedly a general absence of varied interest and incident in native life compared with our own, it must not be supposed that the typical day which I have endeavoured to describe is by any means invariable. There are

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512 in the first place the exigencies of nature: the flood with its opportunities for fishing and the pursuit of small game; the heat of the early North-West season when the grass-burning will go forward and great hunting parties assemble; the long dry spell when the villagers must turn to making sago, or go down to a fishing camp, the streams being then at their shallowest.

512 There are also the many new activities, not always wel-
177 come, which Government control has occasioned. The
653 village must clear its allotted span of track with every moon;
482 the passing of an officer means a turn out of carriers (and the Orokaiva are reputed to be as sturdy and cheerful as any in the Territory); and the approach of a patrol means a mild bustle of diligence in which the village must be made to look its best for fear of magisterial wrath. Again the Plantations scheme and the presence of a supervising officer mean labour of a somewhat new kind, which for those who live from hand to mouth seems irksome because unrepaid by immediate returns.

464 Now and again the recruiter of native labour passes, lays
152 out his trade for those who will bargain to go with him, and leaves perhaps with a batch of young men to 'sign-on' for European employment. But the sadness of parting, however real, is not more moving than the demonstrative welcome at the labourer's home-coming, when his women folk, who threw themselves down and beat their foreheads on the ground for sorrow at his going, do the same again with equal violence for joy at his return.

000 Apart from these sources of interest, and from events of birth, marriage, and death, and again from the more startling incidents of thefts, quarrels, and occasional murders which are all but necessary to any human society, native life is varied by a number of festive and ceremonial occasions which constitute a very important part of it.

765 Not a few of these are associated with the rites of mourning and with the placation of the beings who survive death. When a death occurs mourners, summoned by long blasts of the trumpet, gather from far and wide to the scene and give themselves with what one suspects to be almost joyful abandon to the indulgence of grief. The house of the dead